CLAIMS

1. A method, comprising:

detecting a request for information (RFI) initiated by a user while accessing a content program;

transmitting RFI data to a server on a broadcast network; and

wherein the RFI data includes:

a time at which the RFI was initiated;

a channel accessed at the time the RFI was initiated; and

closed caption data associated with the content program that occurred prior to and including the time at which the RFI was initiated.

2. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the closed caption data further comprises a predefined amount of closed caption data.

3. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the amount of closed caption data further comprises a number of seconds of closed caption data.

4. The method as recited in claim 3, wherein the number seconds of closed caption data further comprises ten seconds or less.

5. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the amount of closed caption data further comprises a number of bytes of closed caption data.

6. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising receiving a system message from the server in response to the transmission of the RFI data.

7. The method as recited in claim 6, further comprising displaying the system message to the user.

8. The method as recited in claim 7, wherein the displaying step occurs in response to a prompt from the user to display the system message.

9. The method as recited in claim 7, further comprising storing the system message in memory until prompted to display the system message.

10. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the request for information is initiated by a single button actuation.

11. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the content program is one of the following types of content program: video, audio, audio/visual, multimedia.

12. A method, comprising:

receiving request for information (RFI) data from a client device on a content broadcasting network, the RFI data indicating that a client device user has requested information about a content item accessed by the client device when a request for information was initiated;

determining if the content item is a content program or an advertisement;

identifying a content program title associated with the content program if the content item is a content program;

identifying an advertiser associated with the advertisement if the content item is an advertisement;

performing an action specified for the identified content item; and

wherein the RFI data includes at least a time at which the RFI was initiated and a channel accessed at the time the RFI was initiated.

13. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending information to the user, the information being related to the content item.

14. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending user information to an entity associated with the content item so that the entity can provide information related to the content item to the user.

15. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the determining if the content item is a program or an advertisement further comprises cross-referencing the time at which the request for information was initiated with content item time code data to determine whether a program or an advertisement was scheduled at the time the request for information was initiated.

16. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein:

the RFI data further comprises closed caption data associated with the content program that occurred prior to and including the time at which the RFI was initiated; and

the determining if the content item is a program or an advertisement further comprises:

> using the closed caption data to derive search terms;

> searching a reference database using the search terms; and

> determining from matches derived from the search to determine if the content item is a program or an advertisement.

17. The method as recited in claim 16, wherein the reference database further comprises keywords, one or more keywords being associated with one or more content items.

18. The method as recited in claim 16, wherein the reference database further comprises scripts of content items that can be compared with the search terms.

19. The method as recited in claim 16, wherein the identifying an advertiser further comprises:

comparing the closed caption data to advertiser keywords; and

identifying an advertiser from one or more matches derived from the search.

20. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein the identifying a program title further comprises:

identifying which of several programs was broadcast on the channel identified in the RFI data at the time identified in the RFI data; and

identifying a title associated with the identified program.

21. The method as recited in claim 12, wherein:

the RFI data further comprises closed caption data associated with the content program that occurred prior to and including the time at which the RFI was initiated; and

the identifying an advertiser further comprises:

deriving one or more search terms from the closed caption data; and

searching an advertiser information database to identify and advertiser.

22. A client device, comprising:

a processor;

memory;

at least one channel tuner;

input means for accepting user input;

a closed caption buffer configured to store a predefined amount of latest available closed caption data;

a request for information application configured to receive and identify a request for information input from a user and transmit request for information data to a server; and

wherein the request for information data includes a channel identifier that identifies a channel tuned to by the channel tuner at the time the request for information was received, a time stamp that identifies a time that the request for information was received, and closed caption data contained in the closed caption buffer.

23.   The client device as recited in claim 22, further comprising a channel identifier configured to identify a broadcast channel accessed by the channel tuner.

24.   The client device as recited in claim 22, further comprising a time stamp module configured to identify a time at which user input is received.

25.   The client device as recited in claim 22, further comprising a closed caption application configured to receive a closed caption signal from a server and display closed caption information with content being shown on a display.

26.   The client device as recited in claim 22, wherein the input means further comprises a button that, when actuated by the user, enters the request for information.

27. The client device as recited in claim 22, wherein the closed caption buffer contains a predefined number of seconds of closed caption data that occurred prior to the request for information.

28. The client device as recited in claim 22, wherein the closed caption buffer contains a predefined number of bytes of closed caption data that occurred prior to the request for information.

29. The client device as recited in claim 22, wherein the client information further comprises information necessary to sufficiently identify a subscriber associated with the client device so that information may be sent to the subscriber by one or more delivery modes.

30. The client device as recited in claim 22, further comprising:

messaging means for receiving a system message from the server; and

display means for displaying the system message.

31. A broadcast network server, comprising:

electronic program guide data that provides program information and scheduling information for a plurality of content items available on a broadcast network;

a response module configured to receive a request for information from a network client containing closed caption data associated with a selected content item accessed at the network client at a time when a client user entered a request for information;

a search program configured to perform a search using search terms derived from the closed caption data to determine a sponsor associated with the selected content item;

a rules module configured to associated a rule with a sponsor associated with the selected content item; and

wherein the response module is further configured to execute an action specified by the rules module.

32. The broadcast network server as recited in claim 31, further comprising:

a program information module;

an advertisement information module; and

wherein:

the response module is further configured to determine whether the request for information was entered during a program or during an advertisement; and

the search module is further configured to search the program information module if the request for information was entered during a program, and to search the advertiser information module if the request for information was entered during an advertisement.

33. The broadcast network server as recited in claim 32, wherein the program information module contains at least of portion of a script of one or more content items available on the broadcast network.

34. The broadcast network server as recited in claim 32, wherein the advertiser information module contains at least of portion of a script of one or more advertisements during broadcasts available on the broadcast network.

35. The broadcast network server as recited in claim 31, further comprising a keywords module; and wherein

the search module is further configured to search the keywords module with the search terms derived from the closed caption data; and

the response module is further configured to determine whether the request for information was entered during a program or during an advertisement from search results.

36. The broadcast network server as recited in claim 31, wherein the action further comprises one or more actions selected from the following list of actions: system message; e-mail message; post mailing.

37. The broadcast network server as recited in claim 31, further comprising a client information module that contains information about how to contact a subscriber associated with the network client; and wherein the action further comprises transmitting client information related to the network client from which the request for information was received to the sponsor.

38. The broadcast network server as recited in claim 31, further comprising a program information module that stores information available for content items available on the broadcast network; and wherein the action further comprises sending information available for the selected content item to the network client.

39. One or more computer-readable media including computer-executable instructions that, when executed on a computer, perform the following steps:

recognizing a user input as a user request to receive information about a content item that the user is viewing on a broadcast network channel;

transmitting closed caption data associated with the content item to a network server, the closed caption data contemporarily corresponding to the user input; and

wherein the closed caption data includes sufficient data from which a context of the content item at a time of the user input can be determined.

40. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 39, further comprising:

receiving a response to the request for information; and

wherein the response includes information about the context of the content item at the time of the user input.

41. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 39, further comprising:

transmitting a time at which the user input was entered; and

transmitting a channel that was being viewed at the time the user input was entered.

42. One or more computer-readable media including computer-executable instructions that, when executed on a computer, perform the following steps:

receiving request for information data from a client connected to a broadcast network, the request for information data including closed caption data that is associated with a content item viewed at the client at the time a request for information was input by a user;

analyzing the closed caption data to determine if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement, and to determine a sponsor associated with the program or advertisement;

determining an action to take depending on the sponsor determination; and

performing the action.

43. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending user-identifying information to the sponsor that the sponsor can use to send information to the user.

44. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending information related to the sponsor to the user.

45. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending a system message to the user.

46. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending an e-mail message to the user.

47. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending information via post to the user.

48. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the analyzing the closed caption data to determine if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement further comprises:

searching a plurality of keywords using search terms derived from the closed caption data; and

determining if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement from matches generated by the search.

49.   The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the analyzing the closed caption data to determine if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement further comprises:

searching text databases corresponding to a plurality of content items using search terms derived from the closed caption data; and

determining if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement from matches generated by the search.

50.   The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the sponsor further comprises a program producer or an advertiser.

51.   One or more computer-readable media including computer-executable instructions that, when executed on a computer, perform the following steps:

receiving request for information data from a client connected to a broadcast network, the request for information data including a time stamp that is associated with a content item viewed at the client at the time a request for information was input by a user;

comparing the time stamp to content time code information to determine if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement, and to determine a sponsor associated with the program or advertisement;

determining an action to take depending on the sponsor determination; and

performing the action.

52. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending user-identifying information to the sponsor that the sponsor can use to send information to the user.

53. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending information related to the sponsor to the user.

54. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending a system message to the user.

55. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending an e-mail message to the user.

56. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the performing an action further comprises sending information via post to the user.

57. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the analyzing the closed caption data to determine if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement further comprises:

searching a plurality of keywords using search terms derived from the closed caption data; and

determining if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement from matches generated by the search.

58. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the analyzing the closed caption data to determine if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement further comprises:

searching text databases corresponding to a plurality of content items using search terms derived from the closed caption data; and

determining if the request for information was input during a program or during an advertisement from matches generated by the search.

59. The one or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 42, wherein the sponsor further comprises a program producer or an advertiser.